

4VAC15-200-12 (New)
Game: Rabbits and Hares: Disposal of wild rabbit parts.

Summary:

The proposal is to prohibit the disposal of wild rabbit parts onto the landscape of the Commonwealth in order to reduce the risk of spreading Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 via deposition of potentially infectious carcass parts on the landscape.

Proposed language of amendment:

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No wild rabbit carcasses or carcass parts may be discarded or disposed of directly on the ground. All such carcasses or carcass parts must be buried at least two feet below ground, incinerated, or securely bagged and discarded in household trash for ultimate disposal in a permitted landfill.

Rationale:

Eliminating the disposal of potentially infectious rabbit carcass parts on the landscape is an important preventative measure intended to reduce the risk of spreading Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus Serotype 2 (RHDV2) throughout the Commonwealth. Because the virus is present in the blood of infected rabbits, most parts of a carcass are contaminated with the virus. In addition, the virus survives for months in dead rabbit parts and can survive freezing. Due to the hardiness and high infectivity of this virus, rabbits can become infected after coming into contact with infectious carcass parts left on the landscape. Thus, disposal of infectious carcass parts on the landscape is believed to be an efficient method of spreading this highly infectious and lethal virus to new areas. Once circulating in a rabbit population, the virus causes high morbidity and mortality, thus potentially leading to severe local or landscape-level rabbit population declines. While it is not known for certain whether RHDV2 will spread across the United States to Virginia, the likelihood is high based upon the documented rapid spread of the disease across both Europe and Australia. To protect Virginia's rabbit species for all citizens, including Virginia rabbit hunters and rabbit dog enthusiasts, steps to limit the deposition of potentially infectious rabbit carcass parts on the landscape is prudent. The DWR RHDV2 Management Plan outlines several pathways to minimize the risk of RHDV2 introduction and spread in Virginia, including development of an RHDV2 outreach campaign, restricted translocation of live wild rabbits within Virginia, restricted importation of potentially infectious non-consumable parts of rabbits that originate from outside Virginia, and elimination of the disposal of potentially infectious leftover carcass parts on the landscape in Virginia. Animal scavengers, such as vultures, opossums, raccoons, and eagles, have the potential to move potentially infectious discarded rabbit carcasses long distances, thereby increasing the likelihood of the spread of RHDV2 across the Commonwealth.